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ADVOCATE OF PEACE.

SEPTEMBER, 1844.

THOMAS CLARKSON ON PEACE.

The following letter was written by Thomas Clarkson, about twenty years since, in reply to an anonymous attack on peace societies, which appeared in a Newcastle paper, but for some reason has never been published. Having had the MS. placed in my hands by the venerable writer, with permission to offer it for publication, if I thought proper, with such alteration and abridgment as I might think desirable, I send it to you for your excellent periodical, and hope that other papers will extensively copy it. I have made no alteration in the argument or mode of expression, and have abridged it only by omitting one rather long paragraph, which, in my view, was not essential. Aside from this, the article is precisely as it came from his pen.

The paper will be found interesting, not only as exhibiting the views of a man who has occupied so distinguished a position as a reformer for more than half a century, and who, now in his 85th year, is permitted yet to tarry with us, and watch with paternal interest the progress of those causes in which he has been actively engaged; but also for the spirit and skill with which the objections to the peace society are met, and the ability with which its principles are vindicated. The article, I am quite sure, is worthy of the space it will occupy in your journal.

REV. G. C. BECKWITH.

H. H. KELLOGG.

To the Editor of the Northumberland and Newcastle Magazine :

SIR,—Having seen the other day a letter in your monthly Magazine, signed “S.,” on the subject of peace societies, I cannot allow it to pass unnoticed, though so long a time has elapsed since its appearance.

When the writer has the indelicacy “to suspect that an increase of the public discontents at the burdens brought on the nation by the late war, was brought on by the leading members of *the peace societies*,” and the shamelessness to assert, “that so much mischief should be concealed under so fair an outside, is no marvel, for Satan transforms himself into an angel of light;” and to say, farther, that his object in coming forward is “for the sake of many well-meaning people, who may be imposed upon by their fair speeches, and the cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive,” he must expect to be dealt with, at any rate, in a plain manner; and he must not take it amiss, should a few expressions, apparently uncourteous, be used towards him in the course of my reply.

I am at a loss to say, in traversing this extraordinary letter, which in my mind is the most predominant feature in it, the puerility or shallowness of the argument, the sophistry, or the pitiable ignorance it displays.

With respect to the childishness of the argument, permit me to observe, that I should not have thought it possible, had I not actually seen it, that any person could have been so thoughtless as to contend before the public, that war is justifiable, because St. Paul “suffered himself to be protected by a band of soldiers;” and much less, that it is justified, because “the people

of God are described by St. John" in a vision "as going to war with their enemies, without any intimation that it was wrong." Your correspondent "S." will doubtless show us, in some future letter, the legitimate connection between the premises and the conclusion on this occasion. I have always understood that logicians begin with their weaker, and conclude with their stronger arguments; but that they usually *discard* those which they judge to be *very weak*, as injurious to their reasoning. Had your correspondent adopted the latter part of this rule, we should not have seen such an outrageous insult upon the understanding, as is contained in the quotations above given.

To the class of shallow argument, I may refer another passage of the New Testament quoted by your correspondent "S." He considers war to be justifiable, because "it was of a soldier that Christ said, 'I have not found such faith, no, not in Israel.' Cornelius was a soldier, when his prayers and alms found acceptance with Heaven, and he was honored with being the first Christian convert among the Gentiles." I should be glad to know how your correspondent arrives at this conclusion by fair reasoning. No other inference can, I presume, be justly drawn from the words of our Saviour, than that the profession of a soldier does not unfit a man from being awakened, corrected and amended by God's Holy Spirit. The Almighty sheds abroad this his vivifying influence both upon the just and the unjust. The dissolute and the hardened are not exempted from such visitations of mercy, nor beyond the power of restoration, where they attend to them. The question, therefore, in the present case, is not, whether war is justifiable, because Cornelius was converted to Christianity (as many thousand soldiers of those times were), but whether, after his conversion, he did (as many thousand soldiers then did) abandon his profession; and as history is silent on this subject, your correspondent can gain nothing from his instance of the centurion. Indeed, there cannot be a doubt, as far as reasoning historically upon the subject will carry us, that Cornelius left the army after he had become a Christian. I quite agree with a learned author, whose work now lies before me, on this point. I will repeat what he says to an objector like your correspondent. "Your next objection," says he, "is drawn from the example of Cornelius, who, you say, continued in the army after his conversion to Christianity; but for this you bring no other proof but the great names of Selden and Grotius, which may be an argument to my modesty, but not to my judgment. The Bible is silent on this head, and the proofs from thence are equal on both sides. To me it seems most probable that he quitted the army, if I may be allowed to argue from the common practice of the primitive converts, who sold their lands, parted with their employments and professions, and left all to follow Christ and the apostles; and Tertullian seems plainly to intimate as much (de Cor. Mil., C. 11), and more plainly (de Idol., C. 19), and this was certainly the opinion of the ancient church; otherwise, after so plain a precedent in Scripture to the contrary, it was impossible that all the fathers of the next age could have so universally agreed in decrying the lawfulness of war, and consequently of serving in the army. But to reduce this argument to a short issue, either the idolatrous tests before mentioned were in force, or they were not; if not, the example of Cornelius can never warrant the lawfulness of serving in the army at a time when we are sure they were in force; if they were then in force, I would fain know if you think St. Peter would have given the least countenance to such idolatry and hypocrisy. But my opinion is, that they were then in force, as appears by several instances I have already produced. And it is very unlikely they should be dispensed with under such a blasphemous, idolatrous tyrant as Caligula, in whose reign Baronius and Bishop Pearson (Annal. Paul, p. 4) have rightly placed the conversion of Cornelius, and not under Tiberius, as you suppose. And besides these tests, which were common to all soldiers, it is plain from Tertullian (de Idol., C. 19) that all above the rank of the *militēs caligati*, or private soldiers, lay under the *necessitas immolationum*, or under the neces-

sity of sacrificing to the heathen gods; which is confirmed by Eusebius (Hist., 7, 15); and for these reasons, I am of opinion that Cornelius quitted the service, when he embraced the Christian religion."

I must place under the same head of shallow argument, one other of your correspondent's observations relative to the New Testament. He says, "that the profession of a soldier is no where condemned nor forbidden in the New Testament, no more than in the Old." I grant it. Our Saviour never left us specific rules, adapted for every specific case of conduct, for such a legacy would have filled many, many volumes,—more, indeed, than even people of leisure could have consulted; but it is a beauty of his dispensation, that in a few short sentences, to be understood and remembered by all, he left us sufficient, whereby to regulate our conduct morally and beneficially, both to ourselves and others. Nor did he inveigh against the wicked governments or the wicked institutions or customs of the times in which he lived; but it is a beauty of his dispensation, that in a few short phrases he left that behind him, which, if duly attended to, would be sufficient in time to undermine them all. And of this, not only we ourselves have had proof in abundance, but those who live after us will have the same, and also additional, in their turn. I should be glad to know what it was, that did away the gladiatorial shows of Rome; or what it was, that impelled the primitive Christians not only to redeem captives, but to enfranchise by their last wills and testaments those whom they held in a state of villenage or bondage; or what it was, that put an end to the custom among our own ancestors, of slaying upon the altars, or of burning alive in a frame of wicker-work, their prisoners, in honor of their gods; what it was, I repeat, but the spirit of Christianity imprinted upon the heart by the seal of God's Holy Spirit? And yet we are sure that neither the gladiatorial shows, nor villenage, nor slavery, nor druidical sacrifices, were specifically condemned or forbidden, nay, not even glanced at, by any expressions that are recorded to have come from the mouth of our Saviour. I should be glad to know also what it was that put an end to the slave-trade in our own times, but the progress of the same spirit from the same sacred cause. I should be glad to know, again, if the great Indian Juggernaut should fall, whether it will not owe its death-wound to the progress of the same influence; and farther, if there be any other vicious custom, that shall be expelled from our earth, even war itself (the monster in whose behalf your correspondent pleads), whether it will not have been chased away by the spirit of Christianity, though not specifically condemned or forbidden by the letter of it.

And here I cannot help saying, that it is a matter of astonishment to me, that your correspondent, who takes upon him "to point out the mischiefs, and explode the absurdities of peace societies," should have overlooked what is the general belief of Christians, viz., that a time will come, when war is to be no more. But if ever such a time is to come, how is the work to be brought about, but by the agency of man under the providence of God? and, if so, it must, like all other works, have its beginning. The truth is, that, according to your correspondent's notions, the present is not the time. He allows, indeed, "that it is very desirable for the world to be in such a state, that there would be no more occasion for war;" but then he adds, "whether it is in such a state at present, may admit of some doubt." What! when Christianity and knowledge, going hand in hand together, have done more towards the moral advancement and happiness of mankind, in the last twenty years, than in any two centuries before, and are still pursuing together the same lovely course; when we have seen the abolition of the slave-trade, the institution of Bible societies, and the promotion of systems for the education of the poor, almost all over the face of Europe, and now lately a disposition on the same continent, and even among princes themselves, to look upon war (the very case before us) as one of the most afflicting evils (both physical and moral) upon earth, are we to be told that there is a doubt about the time of beginning a work, the progress of which cannot but be very slow, and which it may take even centuries to accom-

plish? If this be not the time for so noble an undertaking, I would fain know from your correspondent, when he thinks, in his superior wisdom, that it will arrive. I will answer for him, Never. The present never was, and never will be, the time with any man, who doubts upon any subject, or who sets his face against reformation.

A word or two, now, against the *sophistry*, may I add, the *gross* sophistry of your correspondent's letter, as it is found in the following bold and arrogant assertions, which I must put together in order to explain their drift. "If all military power," says he, "were to be abolished, there would be nothing to prevent the universal spread of anarchy and confusion." He goes on in much the same strain: "Would not the lawless and disobedient rejoice to hear, that all military power was laid aside, that they might rob and murder with impunity? for without military force, furious mobs could not be suppressed. Theft and murder could not be punished." And in the same page, but farther on, he throws his suggestions into something like syllogistic reasoning on the subject. "Without soldiers," says he, "there could be no government; without government, there could be no law; and without law, there could be no living." A fine specimen this of sophistical rodomontade, in which, however, there happens to be one trifling error, viz., that his premises are just good for nothing; from whence it will follow, that his conclusions will be the same. And so we are to see the reign of anarchy and confusion! we are to see robbery and murder committed with impunity! we are to live without government or law! and how is this to be brought about? It is to be brought about, because your correspondent assumes it as a fact, that whenever we shall judge war to be unlawful, then there will be no soldiers, and consequently no effective magistracy. That there would be then no soldiers, according to the idea which we now entertain of soldiers, there can be no doubt. But where did your correspondent collect, except from his own imagination, certainly not from any tracts published by peace societies, that, if foreign wars were to be given up, there would be no force to assist the government against evil doers? What should hinder bodies of men, not soldiers, from being organized and kept up, to assist the civil magistrate on emergencies? and what peace society would object to them, if necessary for, and if confined to, such a purpose? It is probable (seeing that these would have nothing to do with war) that the term "the military" would grow gradually out of use, and sink in time into that of "the police." And this, or something like this, I apprehend, is all the difference that would be occasioned by the change. But to say, that there would be no force to assist the civil magistrate in the exercise of his duties, if wars were abolished, is an idle assertion, without any warrant, and such as no one could use, who had not an intention to deceive.

Nor is his sophistry less conspicuous, in attempting to apply in justification of war, those Scriptural passages which were intended to relate to *magistracy* only. Who could have thought, because our Saviour taught his disciples to pay tribute to Cæsar, that therefore, and on that account, war was to be considered as virtuously legal? This notable conclusion, it appears, is deduced thus. "If it was unlawful to fight," says your correspondent, "it must be wrong to pay others for fighting; but Christ taught his disciples to pay tribute to Cæsar." And so, because soldiers were paid out of the public treasury, war was a lawful custom. With equal reason, he might have said, that the gladiatorial shows of those times before mentioned, in which miserable men (whose only crime was that of being captives in war) were exposed to wild beasts, or to wound and murder each other, for the sport of barbarous spectators, were lawful also; for these shows were kept up out of the public treasury. He might also, with equal reason, have insisted upon the lawfulness of those bloody persecutions of the Christians in the early ages of the church, during which thousands and tens of thousands were dragged to the altars, and butchered there, because, having become converts to Christianity, they would not swear by the heathen

gods; for by whom were these tragical enormities ordered? By the civil magistrate. By whom were they put in execution? By the soldiers. And by whom were the soldiers paid? They were paid out of the tribute money of the Cæsars.

Of the same sophistical kind, are those arguments, taken also from Scripture, which run thus. "Some assert," says your correspondent, "that Christ has forbidden the use of arms, when he says, 'Resist not evil;' but this is not a good argument, because this would prove far too much; for it would tie up the hands of every bailiff, constable, jailer and executioner, just as much as of a soldier; and then what would become of magistracy and law? Our Saviour's words, therefore, cannot have a meaning, which would counteract and annul the whole divine ordinance of government. They cannot be pointed against the sword of the magistrate, because it is God who placed it in his hands." Here we see the old sophisticalrodomontade of bug-bears over again, or an attempt to frighten us on the false notion, that when it should be no longer lawful to go to war, it would be no longer possible to punish crime. But we see something more in this new paragraph of your correspondent, when we examine it more closely. We see an attempt to place the military profession and civil magistracy on the same sacred foundation. We see an attempt to make the *sword of war* synonymous with the *sword of justice*; whereas the apostle Paul, in using the word *sword* on this occasion, used it only as an emblem of punishment in the case of evil doers; with which view he knew a sword to have been suspended at the ceiling of every Roman court of justice. We see an attempt to compare and to confound a custom full of physical and moral evil, with an institution full of every good. But let me ask, where is the just comparison between the two? Magistracy has a virtuous origin, being an ordinance of God. War, on the other hand, comes from our lusts. Magistracy, again, was ordained by God for good. It preserves and enforces the laws of society for the avowed purposes of virtue and happiness. War, on the other hand, is an ordinance of man, pregnant with every evil. It respects neither laws nor societies, and it carries in its train fraud, debauchery, violence, bloodshed and desolation. Magistracy, again, by punishing vice, and vice only, is a terror to evil doers. War, on the other hand, is a terror to those who do well, by confounding in its punishment both the innocent and the guilty.

It appears, then, if we review what has been said in this particular part of the subject, and bring it into a short compass, that your correspondent, by anticipating an effect never likely to be realized, and never contemplated by any one but himself (viz., that robbery and murder, anarchy and confusion, would stalk abroad with impunity, if foreign wars were to be given up, because there would be then no effective magistracy), and by confounding the military profession with civil government, and trying to identify them, as if they were one and the same thing, and from one and the same sacred sources, has attempted to mislead the public, to the prejudice of the peace societies; and he must therefore excuse me, if I state, in his own words, that my object in coming forward on this occasion, is "entirely for the sake of many well-meaning people, who may be imposed upon by his fair speeches, and the cunning craftiness, whereby he lies in wait to deceive."

JOHN WESLEY'S REMONSTRANCE AGAINST WAR.—You may pour out your soul, and bemoan the loss of true, genuine love in the earth. Lost indeed! You may well say, but not in the ancient sense, "See how *these Christians* love one another!" These Christian kingdoms that are tearing out each other's bowels, desolating one another with fire and sword! These Christian armies that are sending each other by thousands, by tens of thousands, quick to hell! These Christian nations that are all on fire with intestine broils, party against party, faction against faction! Yea, what is most dreadful of all, these Christian churches (tell it not in Gath; but alas! how can we hide it from Jews, Turks or Pagans?) that bear the name of Christ, the Prince of Peace, yet wage continual war with each other! O God! how long shall thy promise fail?